

An investment in MDI's children

Rebuilding Camp Beech Cliff for future generations

MOUNT DESERT — Camp Beech Cliff will be renovating its facilities — with construction slated to begin this fall, pending approval by the Mount Desert Planning Board. Since 1997, when Camp Beech Cliff was incorporated as an independent non-profit day camp on MDI, hundreds of youth have attended camp each summer and many have grown up to serve as camp counselors. During the last eight years, hundreds more students have participated in outdoor education and teambuilding experiences that have developed out of the camp's collaboration with local schools and other non-profit organizations.

More than cosmetic improvements are needed to ensure the camp can serve future generations of children. Through detailed assessment, Camp Beech Cliff's board of directors and management have determined that the current facilities are inadequate for the camp's long-term health and safety.

"The program cabins were built in the early 1950s for use as a rustic boys camp," said Board President John Macauley. "Patched, shimmed and shorn up many times over the years, those 60-year-old structures have finally reached the end of their lifespan. In order to continue to provide a safe environment for children, it's time to replace them."

The new structures have been carefully designed to be in keeping with the character of Camp Beech Cliff and Mount Desert Island. Other changes slated during the renovation include:

- Two new program cabins will be built for program areas that currently have no building. Program cabins provide space for rainy day activities, program equipment and supplies.
- A winterized multi-purpose facility attached to a new office building will be constructed on the site of the current headquarters building. This will be the new location for the climbing wall, gym space and a meeting hall, all of which will be available year-round for community programs, as well as camp activities.



Pictured is the Camp Beech Cliff program building and the photo illustrates the sagging ridge line and the shoring-up that has been required for the 60-year-old program cabins. Worn out, but still safe, they all need to be replaced before their safety status changes.

- Various improvements to the roads, paths, wells and such, to provide better safety and services needed throughout the camp. Camp Director Kevin Downey said, "Having bathrooms and good indoor space at the waterfront, as well as a better road to service that area, especially in an emergency, will make a tremendous difference for our waterfront programs. The waterfront is one of our core program areas and we have been trying to improve it piece-meal over the years. This renovation

means that kids will be able to count on swimming, boating and exploring Echo Lake at camp for generations to come."

• The final element of the project is to build some modest summer staff housing that will help the camp recruit and retain high quality staff. Camp Beech Cliff makes it a priority to hire as many local young adults as possible for the 30 camp counselor positions available each year - but the local summer job market is highly competitive, and the camp must hire 10-15 staff members from across the state in order to fill all the positions.

"Yes, this is an ambitious undertaking," said Executive Director Debra Deal. "The camp, and the entire MDI community are extremely blessed because a group of donors has come together to provide sufficient funds for the great majority of the project, which will allow construction to move ahead with confidence. What a wonderful investment that is in our kids! We are so grateful for their generosity to the community and their dedication to making a Camp Beech Cliff experience part of our children's lives."

Camp Beech Cliff intends to run a capital campaign to raise the remainder of the renovation funds and establish a maintenance fund. The camp will also continue its regular annual fundraising for operating costs and the campership fund.

Camp will run as usual this summer. A somewhat smaller camp, temporarily located on an alternate site yet to be determined, is planned for the summer of 2011. And then, as Debbie DeWalt, chairwoman of the Camp Beech Cliff Facilities Committee describes it, "the campers will return to a most amazing new Camp Beech Cliff in 2012."

Camp Beech Cliff is an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit summer camp and outdoor education center located on Echo Lake in Mount Desert. For more information about summer camp and other programs, visit campbeechcliff.org or call 244-0365.